

The Log
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Coral Street & South Bay Avenue
Beach Haven
Ocean County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1104

HABS
NJ
15-BEHAV
3-)

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE LOG

HABS NO. NJ-1104

HABS
NJ
15-BEHAY
3-

Location: Coral Street and South Bay Avenue, Beach Haven, Ocean County, New Jersey

Present Owner: Krewson Family, 311 South Bay Avenue, Beach Haven, New Jersey, 08008

Present Use: Sculpture

Significance: The Log is an example of roadside pop commercial architecture--long popular on parts of the New Jersey Shore, but quickly disappearing.

Description: The Log is a wood-frame, one-story cylinder lying on its side. The door, having the appearance of being located in a wedge cut out of the log, is centered in the front facade, flanked by two windows. The structure's exterior is covered with horizontal strips of bark, except for the wedge, the window trim, and the cylinder's ends--which are wood painted white. The structure is similar to ship construction, with horizontal planks nailed to circular wood ribs. Although seemingly rickety in its state of deterioration, most of the Log's interior wood and framing is hardwood ("teak" and "old shipbuilding material" according to the Krewson's), making the structure extremely heavy and solid. The Log rests on concrete blocks, the bottom having a flattened floor.

The front windows are set in the round log dormer style, with shed "roofs." The windows have sixteen panes, and open with an awning sash operation. Each window has four rafter ends decorating the dormer roofs. The door's top half has four glass panes, and the bottom has two horizontal panels. The Log's north end has a small six-panel window, the south end has a small four-panel window. Centered at the rear of the building is a slight shed extension, possibly to provide a more comfortable space for the person inside. The Log currently contains a collection of junk; the interior appears to be one long room.

The Log is located on a small grass-covered corner lot, one block south of the town's major commercial district. The immediate vicinity is a mix of residential and commercial two and three story buildings. Because Long Beach Island is so narrow at this point, the Log is only about two blocks from both ocean and bay.

The Log shares several characteristics with other pop architecture. Many of these structures experience periods of neglect. Most have a commercial aspect. Similar to the Log, pop architecture is frequently moved from its original location. Finally, its ship's construction is commonly found in certain pop buildings such as milk bottles.¹

History: George Thomas has pointed out that people commonly employ different kinds of stories to explain unusual architecture in their communities; these tales often contain a kernel of

¹ Andrews, The Well-Built Elephant. For milk bottles specifically, see pp.108-9.

truth. In studying Cape May City, Thomas frequently encountered tales of 1) the eccentric owner, 2) the building moved from another location in town, and 3) the building erected a great distance away and hauled to its present location.² The Log is one such unusual building, with an as-yet unsubstantiated tale documenting its history.

Portions of the New Jersey Shore are well-known for their outlandish commercial architecture. In the 1880s, entrepreneurs built five-story structures in the shape of elephants near Atlantic City and Cape May. Restored from the brink of disintegration, "Lucy" the Margate elephant is now a proud reminder of this past. The shore's amusement parks have fostered a tolerance (even affection) for bizarre architecture, and roadside businesses have added "the champagne bottle" and "the windmill," among many others. In Wildwood, Atlantic City, or Seaside Heights, the Log would not stand out as remarkably unusual. Yet some communities, Beach Haven included, have a less blatantly commercial history, and are more interested in showcasing their large Victorian-era private cottages, classy hotels, and turn-of-the-century yacht clubs.

The Log was not the only piece of outlandish pop architecture on Beach Haven. According to Richard Plunkett, president of the Long Beach Island Preservation Commission, chicken farmers used to advertise their businesses roadside with giant chickens. Pop architecture frequently disappears because of 1) it's association with businesses which disappear, 2) because it often was not built to last a long time, and is not adequately maintained, 3) because architectural taste regards it as tacky, and 4) it's roadside site becomes valuable real estate.

The Log's "history," while containing many specific dates, is entirely based upon the recollections of town residents as collected by the present owners. The Log was reportedly constructed in 1926 as the sales office for a real estate company in Medford Lakes, New Jersey, which was developing a summer resort community of log cabins. The Log was then apparently moved in 1942 to the corner of Dock Road and Long Beach Boulevard in Beach Haven, where it was used as a hot dog stand. In 1947-8 it was moved again, to the Coral Street and Long Beach Boulevard, where the aunt of the town's current mayor, Don Darow, operated it as a jewelry store. In 1959 it shifted one lot south down the block, and became part of Ron John's Surf Shop. The current owners purchased the property including The Log in 1964, first operating a restaurant and umbrella rental shop, and now a bike and beach paraphernalia rental shop on the site. In the spring and summer of 1990 they moved the Log one block back to the corner of Coral Street and Long Beach Boulevard, in order to expand their building.³

² George Thomas, "Architecture in Cape May," in George Thomas and Carl Doebley, Cape May, Queen of the Seaside Resorts: Its History and Architecture (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1976), pp.44-8.

³ Personal interview, Mary Lou Platt Krewson and Darren Krewson, August 10, 1992.

Other sources present mixed evidence concerning the veracity of this story. A construction date of 1926 is plausible since the late 1920s and early 1930s marked a high point in the creation of pop architecture.⁴ Secondly, the Medford Lakes developer Leon Todd indeed launched his log cabin development in 1927. This exclusive residential community did pursue gimmicks, such as using Indian themes in naming roads and events, and requiring log construction. Todd built a lodge/hotel in 1929 for prospective buyers; today an Indian guards the hotel entrance. Yet the extreme exclusiveness of the community would argue against a roadside promotional building like the Log. Medford Lakes was wealthy, white and Christian. One in-depth article on Medford Lakes' history does not mention the Log, but does contain a photograph of a very substantial log administrative building.⁵

In the summer of 1992 the Log sat quietly deteriorating on a grassy lawn. Because of a legal complication arising from the Log's last move, one of the Log's neighbor's, an attorney, has prevented the Krewsons from restoring the building as a sculpture. The entire town has become involved in the question of whether the Log should be permitted to stand where it is, be moved yet again, or torn down. One irony of this controversy is that recently a wave of commercial development has engulfed Beach Haven, comprised of enormous, first-class miniature golf compounds. Miniature golf is in many ways a close relative of the Log, and one cannot help but guess that if the Log were inside one of the golf courses, it would not offend those who are now offended by it. Several blocks south of the miniature golf, the Log demands the attention of curious passers-by.

Historian: Alison Isenberg, HABS, Summer 1992

Sources: Andrews, J.J. The Well-Built Elephant and Other Roadside Attractions: A Tribute to American Eccentricity, New York: Congdon & Weed, 1984.

Krewson, Mary Lou and Darren, current owners,
interview by Alison Isenberg, August 10, 1992.

Lentz, Gloria. "Medford Lakes," Burlington County Times, Accent! Magazine, Sunday edition 17 August 1975, pgs. 2-7.

⁴ J.J. Andrews, The Well-Built Elephant and Other Roadside Attractions: A Tribute to American Eccentricity, (New York: Congdon & Weed, 1984), pp.vii -xii.

⁵ Gloria Lentz, "Medford Lakes," Accent! magazine in the Sunday edition of the Burlington County Times, (August 17, 1975), p.2-7.

Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

Thomas, George. "Architecture in Cape May,"
in George Thomas and Carl Doebley, Cape May, Queen of the Seaside Resorts: Its History and Architecture Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1976.

Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatza (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs.